



Al-Risala 1986

March

Editorial

In every work – be it religious, philosophical, artistic or scientific – there is always one central idea which pulls together the different parts into a meaningful whole. Without this, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the significance of the separate parts.

This point is very well illustrated by the story of the seven blind men. They were taken before an elephant and asked to say what it was. One touched its legs and said they were pillars, another touched its side and took it for a wall, a third felt the tusk and was convinced it was a sword – and so on.

Although there were so many blind men all touching different parts of the elephant, not one of them could make head or tail of what it really was. In no way could their separate notions add up to the reality – for lack of a central idea.

The case of Islam is on an exact parallel to this. To all external appearances, it is the combination of various parts. It is prayer. It is pilgrimage. It is the giving of alms. It is the spreading of the message. It is living in harmony with one's fellow men. It is humility of demeanour and the willingness to bow to the rights of others. But what is it that binds all of these parts together and gives them meaning?

The central idea in the case of Islam is the relationship between God and man, man's discovery of his Creator and Sustainer, his wholehearted attachment to Him and his total mental and physical prostration before Him. This is the real, central part of Islam, while all other features are relative. If we fail to relate the parts to the central idea, there is no single part which can, by itself remain either explicable or significant. To understand true value of Islamic acts, we must go to the fountain head: God.

2 March 1986

Speaking little, and not holding grudges against anyone

A companion of the Prophet lay dying. People saw that his face was shining, and asked why. "I had two habits which stood me in good stead," the man explained: "for one, I did not indulge in idle talk, and, secondly, my heart was free of malice towards any Muslim."

The Modern Science of Theology

Modern Theological science is a substantiation of religious dogmas with due regard for contemporary intellect; or a presentation of Islamic teachings according to modern rational methods. First of all, we must ascertain exactly what this contemporary intellect is. Contemporary intellect is synonymous with scientific intellect, or that intellect which emphasizes the importance of the essential nature of things. The scientific revolution has had a profound effect on human thought. Due to it theories are required to be based on experiment and observation rather than on hypothesis and analogy. The upheaval of the present age has occurred because of the discovery of the realities of nature. All things, from the bicycle to the aeroplane, from light bulbs to huge factories, operate on the basis of these natural realities. This is the revolution which has, in fact, stolen the limelight in our modern age, for it has affected every department of human life, and has likewise altered modes of speech. For thousand of years man was engaged in a futile attempt to turn iron into gold by means of highly secret formulas. Now, thanks to the discovery of natural realities iron is converted into machines more precious than gold. Under these conditions added credibility supported by theories proven by the realities of nature is only to be expected. Since the progress of modern man has been due to his discovery of realities, he is bound to attribute importance only to that theory which is supported by these realities.

This difference between the modern and ancient intellect may be understood by means of a simple example. Some fifty years ago such terms as "family prescription", "hereditary cure", "royally mixed medicine" etc., used to carry great weight with physicians. If any of these terms were used with respect to any medicine or toothpowder, it meant that it contained hidden properties. Nowadays, however, these terms have no value. Today's doctor will not use this outmoded terminology when explaining the efficacy of a certain medicine. Rather he will point out that this product has been prepared scientifically and that its advantages have been ascertained by means of established evidence and experiments, the validity of which can always be tested by repetition. The very phrase "family cure" implies that its medicinal properties are not open to general investigation and that the connection between illness and cure has not been ascertained by any specific experiments. Rather its acceptability is attributable to its wide usage over a long period of time. Today's customer seeks that product which has been manufactured on scientific lines. Likewise it is only those ideas whose truth is verified by natural realities that he is ready to accept.

4 March 1986

Character Builds the Nation

Toyota, a Japanese motor company, has been functioning for the last thirty years without a single day ever having been wasted, and without its production ever once having slackened. This is only one of the many examples which explain the fast development of industry in Japan. General Motors and the Ford Motor Company of the U.S.A. are the biggest motor manufacturing companies in the world. The annual production of these motor companies is, on an average, 11 cars per employee, while the Toyota Motor Company annually produces 33 cars per worker.

Considering the non-existence *or* at least paucity of all the major raw materials of industry in Japan – coal, iron, petroleum, etc., – Japan still manage to surpass all other countries in industrial progress. One might well ask why. A *Hindustan Times* commentator (25 August, 1981) attributes Japan's success to "A national spirit of compromise and co-operation, and a willingness to endure short-term setbacks for the long-term good of the nation, company or family."

It is temperament then which plays the most crucial role in the making of a nation. It is important in nation-building in the way that bricks are important in any kind of construction work. A house made of unfired bricks is unsafe, because any calamity, even a minor one, can bring it tumbling down. A building, on the other hand, which is made of kiln-fired bricks can be trusted to withstand the onslaught of tempests and floods.

A character so tempered that it can be depended upon through thick and thin – like the kiln – fired brick – is what in the long run builds a nation, for it is only such a temperament which can remain attuned to the more and more complex procedures of industrialization and remain steadfastly geared to national progress.

The story of Adam and Lucifer

This world has been created as a test for man: that is the way that Islam teaches us to look at life. Everyone who comes into the world is created for one reason alone – to be put among fellow humans in order to be tested. Finally, we will all return to God, there to be repaid according to our deeds on earth.

Where – in what arena – is man being tested? The answer to this question can be ascertained from the story of Adam and Lucifer. When God put the first man, Adam, on earth, He commanded the angels and Lucifer to bow down before Adam. The angels immediately did as they were told. Lucifer, however, demurred. "Adam You created from mud," he protested to the Lord, "while I was created from fire. That means I am better than Adam. Why should I bow before him?"

God then sent both Adam and Lucifer down to Earth, where Lucifer determined to send all of Adam's offspring astray. The Lord warned Lucifer that he and his followers would be fuel for the fire of hell.

It is clear from this story that the path Lucifer followed was one of pride. He considered himself superior to Adam, refusing to bow down before one he considered inferior to himself, refusing to honour one whom God had commanded him to pay his respects to.

Repeatedly people have dealings with one another in this world. Perhaps the person one has to deal with appears stronger than oneself, and one pays him his due on account of the clout that he wields. But he might also appear to be weak and inconsequential. If, in this case, one ignores his right and refuses to pay him his due, one is following Satan. The way to tread the angels' path is by following set principles in one's life, rather than the dictates of self-interest and opportunism. One will then treat all alike, irrespective of whether they are strong or weak, for one will be following the same, constant principles throughout one's life, and in all one's dealings.

5 March 1986

Piety is to get by, avoiding evil

Abu Huraira was asked what piety was. "Have you ever treaded on a thorny path," he said in reply. "Why, yes," the man answered. "What did you do?" Abu Huraira asked him. "When I saw a thorn, I kept to one side. I got by, avoiding thorns." "That is what piety is," Abu Huraira said.

6 March 1986

Bored to Death

The poor tend to think that their difficulties are due only to a lack of resources. They feel that it is just a question of having enough wealth and they will be able to solve all their problems. But that is very far from being the truth. Just as there are problems for the poor, so are there problems for the rich.

Consider the import of this news item—"Bored to Death"—which appeared not so long ago in the American Press.

"The millionaire was tired, weary and bored. He called for his continental limousine, got in and said to the chauffeur, 'James drive full speed over the cliff. I've decided to commit suicide.'"

Hardly one's idea of the ultimate American Dream.

What then is the secret of a happy, peaceful life? To use an expression with a religious aura, it is resignation – an uncomplaining endurance which leads to contentment. This is an approach to life which makes it possible for one to be content with whatever God has seen fit to provide. The average person, unfortunately, thinks of little else besides the making of money as a panacea for all ills. But if this were all there was to life, then the rich ought never to be miserable. They should certainly not want to have themselves driven over cliffs in a state of sheer mental desperation! If the truth were known, what is immeasurably more important than the making of money is the fostering of an attitude of acceptance, because the contentment which this brings is the real secret of a happy life. The contented man will not care whether his circumstances are good, bad or indifferent. Affluence and Penury will be as one to him.

6 March 1986

Some look to eternity, others see only the present world

When the Prophet was commanded to make his mission public he stood on top of the hill of Safa and called on the people of Mecca. They gathered to hear what he had to say. "I am warning you of a dreadful damnation to come," he said. "Perpetual damnation be upon you," Abu Lahab replied. "Is that all you called us together for?"

Oppressors Never Prosper

Nizam al-Mulk Tausi was the name of a famous vizier, prime minister, to two Seljuk kings – Alp Arsalan (1063-'72) and Malik Shah (1073-'92). He is remembered for his highly effective handling of the reigns of government, his control over affairs of state having been so complete that the king, it is said, was left with only two functions – sitting on the throne and going out hunting. Finally he fell victim to enemies of the Seljuk dynasty. An assassin, dressed in Sufi garb, slew him in the year 1092. His death signalled the beginning of the end for the Seljuks.

Christian and Muslim historians are unanimous in their praise of Nizam al-Mulk's enlightened method of government. Professor P.K. Hitti, in his *History of the Arabs*, calls his period in power "one of the ornaments of the political history of Islam." Among his most outstanding achievements was the establishment of the college of Nizamiyya, named after Nizam al-Mulk and dedicated by him in 1067. It was from this college that Nizam al-Mulk used to draw educated people to operate the state's executive and judiciary institutions. Nizam al-Mulk wrote a book on political theory, the Persian name of which is *Siyasat-Nama*. The book has been translated into English under the title *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings* (tr. H. Drake, London, 1960). In this book, Nizam al-Mulk wrote:

"An un-Islamic government may last a while, But tyranny cannot endure."

This is a rule that applies, not only to kings, but to every single human being. Every individual has a certain area of influence and power. In a ruler's case, this area is large, whereas in the case of an ordinary person, it is comparatively small. If one wishes to prosper on earth it is imperative that one refrain from oppression within one's own domain. One who oppresses those over whom he wields power cannot himself escape punishment for his actions. In the case of most sins, God will punish their perpetrators in the next life. In the case of tyranny and oppression, the punishment for them starts in this world. There is no way out for the tyrant. God will certainly redress the wrongs that he has done others. Sooner or later, he is sure to be visited by the wrath of God.

People usually oppress others with a view to consolidating their own position, and that of their offspring. But it is the very people they seek to protect who eventually fall victims to their oppression. If oppression and cruelty become permanent features of an individual's policy, the savage after-effects of his own actions will cause suffering to his own kith and kin for generations to come.

8 March 1986

History Speaks

Roger II (1095-1154), founder of the Norman dynasty in Sicily, holds a distinguished place among medieval European monarchs. He had his capital at Palermo, and is noted for having made Sicily into a prosperous country. He established a strong administration, and constructed a powerful fleet. The success of Roger II, according to a western historian, can be attributed in part to the fact that he "made Sicily a meeting place of European and Arabic scholars."

Al-Idrisi was a contemporary of Roger II. Born in Marakesh, he was educated in Spanish universities. Later he travelled extensively in Europe, Asia and Africa. He became the greatest geographer of his age, and a close friend and adviser to Roger II, at whose court he served as official geographer. Roger II originally invited Al-Idrisi to Sicily to make a map of the world for him.

Here we can see the cause of the esteem in which Muslims were held in times past. They made Islam a dominant force on the world scene, not through protests and demands, nor from spreading conflict and terror, but through being useful to the world. By virtue of hard struggle, they established themselves as intellectual leaders of the world. They had something that others did not have, so people flocked to their sides. That was how Muslims raised their standing in the world in times past. It is by the same method that they can improve their position today, and build for a better future.

A blessing, not a curse

According to Abu Huraira, someone said to the Prophet: "Curse the idolators." "I have not been sent as a curse." the Prophet replied. "I have been sent as a blessing." (Hadith)

Realizing One's own Shortcomings

He had reached old age and was still unmarried. When asked his reason for remaining a bachelor, he said that he had always been looking for a perfect spouse. "But in all this time, did you not find one?" he was asked. "Once I did," he replied, "but unfortunately she was looking for a perfect spouse too, and I did not come up to the required standard."

Generally people are expert at detecting the faults of others. That is why they are unable to get on with anybody. If they were to seek out their own faults, instead of those of others, they would realize that they are in the same position as they find others to be in. Awareness of one's own shortcomings makes for a spirit of humility in individuals and unity in society. If one sees only the faults of others, on the other hand, one will become arrogant, and perennially be at odds with one's fellows.

It is a fact of psychology that no single person can be an amalgam of all good qualities. Just as there are many shades of grey between black and white, so are there many gradations of good and evil in ordinary human beings. While few are saints, few also are the out-and-out villains of this life, and many are the combinations of different qualities and defects than one can find in any given individual. It is no simple matter to label a person wholly good or wholly bad. If there is to be harmony within a community, the bad sides of its members must be tolerated, while their good sides are appreciated. In this way, no talent is lost to society, and fellow feeling will prevail. This is a principle that should be remembered in all life's relationships. Man and wife, employer and employee, businessman and partner – all need to keep it in mind. If we want to pluck "flowers" we have also to bear the "thorns" that come with them. There is no way that one who cannot put up with thorns will be able to possess the flowers of life.

There are few great tasks which can be accomplished by individuals single-handed. Only the talents of several individuals combined can achieve any substantial work. Just as this is true in commercial and political spheres, so is it true of religious work also. But in whatever field work is going on, people will only be able to work together if they are patient and tender-hearted in their outlook.

They will have to bear with one another, putting ill-feeling behind them, not becoming alienated towards one another over petty issues. It is all very well to be an idealist, but if one eternally seeks the ideal in people, one is bound to be disappointed. The only way to be able to work with others, then, is to overlook the fact that they do not come up to one's ideal standard, and even to extend moral support to those who seem the most deficient.

10 March 1986

Solutions

Mr. Malcolm Forbes has, with great pertinence, made this observation about problem-solving: "It's so much easier to suggest solutions when you don't know too much about the problem."

Facing a problem in even the most ordinary of social circumstances can be like having your shirt stuck in a thorn-tree. The more you pull it, the more it gets stuck. Even if you do succeed in extricating it, it gets torn to shreds in the process. It is then that patience is of the essence, for such situations require in-depth study, and attempts to solve such "thorny" problems should be done with great discretion.

Unless one is on the spot, one cannot understand the delicacy of certain situations and it is pointless to offer solution after solution.

Social life is, indeed, a complex affair. It is seldom desirable to take the initiative without at least having the tacit consent of others. The power and influence of others should never be ignored or under-estimated.

All possibilities as well as all known factors should be taken into account and, having done this, one should learn to wait patiently for the opportune moment before taking any action. Confrontation should be avoided at all costs.

One who is truly sensitive to the complexities of societal existence will hesitate a hundred times before offering solutions which may offend the sense of delicacy of his fellow-men.

10 March 1986

Their longing for people to believe

Abdullah Ibn Abbas had great knowledge of the Qur'an. He possessed unusual ability to penetrate to the very depths of Qur'anic teachings. One day, when he was explaining the Qur'an in his own inimitable style, one of his audience exclaimed: "Even if the pagans of Daylum heard this they would accept Islam."

Negligence: A Moral Deficiency

It is hard to believe that any animal could be more dangerous or terrifying than the man-eating tiger. But it is not the tiger or the bear who is the most dangerous enemy of man. In truth, the most dangerous of our enemies are the bacteria which are so tiny that they remain invisible to the naked eye. Small they may be, but these bacteria breed at such a furious rate that, given favourable conditions, one of their number can reproduce itself 10,000 times over within a mere matter of ten hours. While a bear or a lion only occasionally eats a man alive, man is the constant focus of deadly bacteria,

Their species run into thousands, We are fortunate, however, in that 99 percent are either beneficial or harmless. Though only one percent is harmful, its deadliness is such that it can claim the life of a man within a matter of seconds. All fatal diseases, according to medical science, are produced by such micro-organisms. Their very lack of bulk makes it possible for them to enter the human system in ways against which man has no natural system of defence.

People are usually aware of big and obvious dangers, and imagine they must be responsible for all their misfortunes. But, if the truth were told, the harm done to us by these tiny living organisms far surpasses any havoc our bigger enemies can wreak. Yet, when we come to think of it, the greatest damage of all is done by those seemingly insignificant and often short-lived moments of neglect – moments when timely action was our duty, when approval needed to be given or withheld, when advice or help or self-appraisal was needed, and we let the occasion slip by, heedless of the consequences. Easy-going negligence can creep into our souls, like bacteria into the body, and, if not pulled up short, can become an ingrained attitude, leading to moral corrosion

A negligent attitude permits people to fritter away their time, day after day, with no thought for the future. Similarly, they squander substantial portions of their income. This wasted time and pointless expenditure may seem a trivial matter, if it is just a question of one day – a few hours and a few rupees don't seem to add up to much. But if one were to calculate the time and money thus wasted in one year and then in a whole lifetime, it would become clear that fully fifty percent of one's life and earnings had been squandered in vain pursuits. Take the total wastage of a whole nation and the loss assume such enormous proportions that it quite goes beyond the imagination.

The Mission of the Prophets

We often come across the view that only a small minority of the messengers of God were able to achieve their goal; that most of them could not go beyond the mere proclamation of the truth; that is, they failed to establish truth on earth.

But such views are far from the truth. How was it possible for the messengers of God to have failed in the task assigned to them while God was at their sides? The question of their failure just does not arise. Such a conception is misguided.

The real fault lies in choosing the wrong criterion by which to judge the mission of the Prophets, that, the degree to which they brought about a social and political revolution. This is the criterion by which to judge the success or failure of ordinary mortals. By this token, those Prophet who brought about political revolution would be considered successful and those who did not would be considered failures.

This is not, however, the right way to judge the mission of the Prophets. Their mission was simply proclamation of the truth. In no sense were they meant to establish a system. The Prophets were sent to convey to the people the word of God in its pure form and it was to be presented in the best possible way. They had to convey it in such a way that the congregation would fully understand the message and would bear witness to having been shown the true path – whether or not the message was accepted by them. When a Prophet fulfilled these two conditions he had fully discharged his responsibility.

When we set this standard of judgement, we find that all of the Prophets fully succeeded in achieving their goal, since each of them did his utmost to carry out the duty assigned to him – that of proclamation of truth. The Prophets spared no effort in conveying the will of God to their nations. So much so that their congregations were never left with the excuse that they had not been shown the way. They could never come before God, pleading their ignorance.

Procession of Death

A coffin is being carried aloft towards the grave. It seems like a journey, not just from one point to another, but from man's beginning to his end.

When man is born into this world, he immediately has recourse to a mother's compassion and a father's protection. He grows up among friends and relatives. Then he reaches adulthood and forges ahead on his chosen path through life.

His journey continues until finally death comes. Those relatives who had supported him through life now carry him to his final resting place. They lay him under a mound of earth where he is alone; where there is just him and his Lord.

Uptill that point, he had been confronted with humans like himself; now he is face to face with a God infinitely greater than himself. Uptill then he had been in a world where he had power of his own, now he finds himself absolutely powerless. Man, the most helpless of creatures', will come before God the All-Powerful—a meeting so awesome that it is almost beyond imagining.

People are continually dying here on earth. Not a day goes by without our seeing or hearing of the death of someone or the other. Yet we fail to realize the implications of death. This is because in our minds we lack a living picture of Heaven and Hell. We are preoccupied with other, totally unrelated, matters. We are too busy making homes for ourselves in this world to look to our eternal home. We are too concerned with worldly profit-making to care whether we have done enough to earn life everlasting. We are too involved with improving our position in society to consolidate our relation with God. We think of every human being in the same worldly terms, so when a person dies, we feel only a sense of loss that one who gave so much to the world has been taken away from it. We see man in relation to this ephemeral world, but fail to see him in relation to the next eternal world. How then can we realize the implications of death; how can we see that, as one is led to one's "rest", one is in fact being led to one's meeting with the Lord and one's eternal fate?

14 March 1986

The More Hurry, the Less Speed

An Indian Airlines Airbus, flight IC 406, from Bombay to Delhi, left Bombay half an hour behind schedule. Soon after the takeoff, one of the passengers sent a note to the pilot, Captain Bhatnagar, asking him the reason for the delay in departure. The latter asked him to come to the cockpit so that he could explain the position to him.

The passenger not only refused to be convinced, but hit captain Bhatnagar from behind saying:

"I have seen many pilots like you!"

Upset over the incident Captain Bhatnagar decided to return to Bombay 25 minutes after the take-off. This naturally led to strong protests from the other passengers. Later, the Indian Airlines arranged for another crew to take the flight to Delhi. The net result? The flight reached Delhi over three hours late.

This is an example of how important it is to adopt a patient attitude in life. The above mentioned passenger refused to put up with a delay of half an hour, and, as a result, he had to wait for three hours. Had he remained patient about the half-hour delay, he would have certainly saved himself from the trouble of waiting for three hours.

Further, according to the report, a high-level inquiry has been ordered into the incident by the Airlines. No matter what the result of the inquiry, it is certain that the passenger will have to sacrifice more the thing he had wanted to save – time.

14 March 1986

Surrendering to God, and wishing others well

Jarir came to embrace Islam. The Prophet asked him to extend his hand for the oath of allegiance. "Allegiance on what?" Jarir asked. "That you will surrender to God, and wish every Muslim well." He then swore allegiance to the prophet. He was a very clever man. When swearing allegiance, he said to the Prophet that he would do what he could. Afterwards, this clause was included in everybody's oath.

15 March 1986

A Manner of Speaking

The Prophet Mohammad always used to be very clear in his speech. He would utter words slowly, in a careful and considered tone. This is how the Prophet's widow Aishah described her late husband's manner of speech to those who had not heard him:

"The Prophet would not speak fast as you people do. He used to pause in between sentences, giving people time to memorise what he had said."

(*Zad al-Ma'ad*)

She also said that the Prophet used to talk in such a way that one could have counted his words had one so desired. The Prophet's manner of speech should provide a pattern for all believers. What is a believer? He is one who fears God, one who knows that the angels are recording his every word. Alive to the knowledge that he will have to answer to God for everything he says, he assumes a deep sense of responsibility. When he speaks, it is as if he is addressing a divine and angelic company. He is restrained in his speech; he thinks before he speaks; he weighs up his words carefully before presenting his ideas to his listeners. Fear of God takes away his loquacity; fear of the hereafter, and of being answerable to God for his words, dampen his oratorical zeal.

A person beset by intense feelings of this nature adopts a serious, sober manner of address, like the manner of the Prophet as described by Aishah.

15 March 1986

Preaching the word of God in the language of one's congregation

Salman Farsi was commander of a Muslim army during the Iranian campaign. He had laid siege to one fortress, and his soldiers were eager to sack it. But Salman Farsi told them to give him a chance to communicate the message of Islam to the people first, for that was the Prophet's method. Addressing the inhabitants of the fortress, Salman said: "I am a Persian like you. See how these Arabs obey me. Accept Islam. You will have the same rights, and duties, as we have. And if you wish to adhere to your religion, then pay Jizya*. And if you refuse this also, then be prepared to fight." According to Abu'l Bakhtari, Salman said all this in Persian (Masnad Ahmad).

* The Protection tax imposed on non-Muslim Living under Muslim rule.

16 March 1986

Lesson from a Tiger

Jim Corbett, after whom a famous national park in India has been named, was an expert on the nature of tigers. He once wrote that: "No tiger attacks a human being unless provoked." People who live in jungle areas where tigers roam will confirm the truth of Jim Corbett's words. There is usually no cause for concern when one comes face to face with a tiger. Unless it is provoked – or harbours deep-rooted suspicion of human beings – the beast will ignore one and continue on its way.

And how does this suspicion form in some tigers? : Tigers are by nature not ill-disposed towards human beings. Only very few of them can be called man-eaters, and even they were not born as such. They became man-eaters, not through any fault of their own, but through the folly of human beings. Usually it is inexperienced hunters who do the damage. They shoot at a beast, wounding but not killing it. A tiger injured in this manner becomes man's enemy. Wherever it sees a human being, it attacks and kills. The same is true of most beasts of prey. They only attack man when they have already been wounded by him.

This information from the world of nature holds deep significance for man. It shows that one should not think of anyone – not even the most savage people – as one's enemy in advance. One will only be treated as an enemy if that is how one sees others. If one does not view them with animosity, then they will not do so either.

The second lesson is that one should not take measures against anyone without sufficient preparation. If the measures that one takes are indecisive then they are sure to be counter-productive. The other party will only become further provoked, and tension between the two will deepen further.

Everyone has certain needs and desires in this world, which they remain busy fulfilling. The secret of life is not to stand in a person's way. If one does not make oneself a target for another's vengeance, but lets everyone continue pursuing their own goal in life, then one is not going to find one's own path blocked by others. One will find everyone so absorbed in minding their own business that they have no time to interfere with that of others.

Faith

Some people from Najran, a district between Yaman and Najd, inhabited by a Christian tribe, came to see the Prophet. They heard him read a passage of the Quran. It immediately dawned on them that the religion he taught was the true one. They fell down, weeping, in prostration before the Lord. "When they listen to that which was revealed to the Apostle," the Quran says, "you will see their eyes fill with tears as they recognize its truth. They say: 'Lord, we believe, count us among the witnesses'" (5:83).

"Recognition of truth"; that is how faith has been defined in this verse. When one recognizes something, one reacts to it according to its nature. God is the greatest of all beings. Recognition of such an All-powerful Being sparks off feelings of humility and submission in a person. These people from Najran recognized God in the words of the Quran. They saw there all the glory of the Lord. Their reaction: tears flowed down their cheeks and their bodies fell down prostrate in an act of spontaneous submission.

Now let's have a look at tradition related by Imam Muslim on the authority of Uthman ibn Affan: "Whoever dies knowing that there is no god save Allah shall enter paradise."

Traditionally faith is referred to as "knowing". Knowing indicates awareness. Faith, then, is a matter of knowing – making a conscious discovery.

In fact, the modern word discovery is an apt one for describing the phenomenon of faith. To believe in God is to discover Him. It is for God, who is not visible in the normal sense of the term, to appear before one's eyes. Faith is to become deeply aware of God; it is for the veil of the Unseen to be drawn apart, and for one to have an inward sight of God despite his outward invisibility.

Faith is for God's slave to establish a connection with his Lord. We can see a material example of this in the connection between a bulb and a generator. When a bulb is connected to a generator it bursts into brilliant light. It becomes something that it had not been previously; its darkness turns into light. So it is when a person makes connection with God: his being becomes full of God; he assumes divine characteristics which completely alter his state.

This was what faith meant for the Companions of the Prophet. For them belief was to emerge from one life and to become totally immersed in another; it was to discover light after being submerged in darkness. Look at what Hudhaifah once said to the Prophet: "We were in ignorance, Apostle of God, and the Lord sent us this wealth of good." His words show what a complete transformation the act of faith involved for the Companions.

Faith acquired in this manner differs entirely from conventional, inherited faith, for such faith is transferred automatically from one generation to the next. It does not move a person, or inspire him to take decisions for himself. All it does is attach a person to long-established traditions and norms.

Spontaneously – acquired faith, on the other hand, never fails to move and inspire one. Those who subscribe to an inherited faith need to have everything spelt out for them; they do not acquire vision of their own. Such is not the case with faith which comes as a discovery. Faith of this nature is a live creed which endows one with the vision to judge each matter according to its merits.

Faith born of blind adherence to the way of one's ancestors can only be a stagnant form of faith. Its effect is very different from that of faith which comes from personal realization. The latter transforms one's thoughts and actions. How different also the two hosts of faithful, one subscribing to an inherited faith and the other to a faith which they believe in from the depths of their hearts, one that is backed up by the force of personal conviction. Such faith produces people who can move mountains on the landscape of history, who are possessed of great vision and farsightedness. That is because they really believe in what they are working for; it is the spontaneous outpouring of their discovery of God. Their faith is a divine phenomenon, while the faith of those who imitate their ancestors takes the form of national culture and tradition.

18 March 1986

Greed for the world destroys a person

The Prophet sent Abu Ubaida Ibn Jarrah to Bahrain to collect taxes. When he returned, the Ansar heard that he had brought money back, and joined the Prophet in the morning prayer. When he had finished praying, they came forward. The Prophet smiled on seeing them. "I think you have heard that Abu Ubaida has brought something back from Bahrain," he said to them. They said that they had. "You can rejoice and expect that which is pleasing to you," he said. "By God, I do not fear your impoverishment. What I do fear is that you should be given abundance in the world, like those before you. I fear that you should become greedy for the world, as they did, and that you should perish, as they perished."

In everything there is a Sign

The Indian writer Khwajah Hasan Nizami (1878-1955) once wrote an article in Urdu entitled "Story of a Fly". In it he complained to a fly about the bother it caused people. "Why don't you let us sleep in peace?" he remonstrated. "The time for sleep and eternal repose has not yet come." the fly replied. "When it does, then you can sleep in peace. Now it is better for you to remain alert and active." This little exchange shows that if one remains open to admonition, one will find a lesson for one's life even in such mundane events as the buzz of a fly. If one's mind is closed, on the other hand, then not even the roar of bombshells and artillery fire will be able to break through its barriers. Only the tempest of the Last Day will bring such people to their senses, but that will not be the time to take heed: that will be a time for retribution, not constructive action.

The Quran tells us of one who is admitted to paradise bringing before God "a sound heart" (26:89). There is a saying of the Prophet to much the same effect. "Whomsoever God wishes good for," he said, "He instructs in religion." Looked at together, these statements show that God's greatest blessing to a person is an open mind and a sound, receptive intellect that sees truth for what it is. Such a mind is free of complexes: it is able to form opinions in a free and unprejudiced spirit. A sound mind does not take long to absorb any truth, or take in any lesson contained in the world at large. The universe is like spiritual sustenance for such a mind, which develops and thrives by deriving nourishment from what it sees, feels and hears in the world around it.

Signs of God are spread all over the universe. In some places it is rocks and inanimate matter that provide a pointer to some profound reality, in others it is "flies"—menial objects—that sound out a message for man. Sometimes an event of great instructive import occurs in the human world. Sometimes God enables one of His servants to call his fellow men to truth in plain, spoken language. In all such instances it is one who has opened his mind to truth who will find it. If one is not receptive to instruction one will gain nothing from all the signs that are scattered throughout the world. An open mind derives instruction even from a "fly", while not even divine revelation and prophetic teachings can break down the barriers of a closed mind.

There is nothing that can take the place of a receptive intellect. One who remains open to instruction will look on the whole world as living proof of divine realities. One who goes through life with a closed mind, however, is like a beast who hears and sees all, but understands nothing.

20 March 1986

Dreams and Success

Mr. Ram Ratan Kapila runs a refrigerator and air-conditioner business by the name of Kapsons, its offices being located in Asif Ali Road in New Delhi. Needing a catchy name for his firm, he advertised for one in the newspapers, promising a handsome reward for the best slogan. In spite of repeatedly advertising, no apt slogan was forthcoming. He kept racking his brain day in and day out, but could not hit on anything that sounded just right.

Six whole years came and went, then one night Mr. Kapila dreamt he was in a beautiful garden, with birds chirruping and perfect weather. Delighted with his surroundings, he exclaimed, "What wonderful weather!" It had taken him six years, but he had found the right catchphrase at last:

"Kapsons: the weather masters."

The dream is an activity which goes on in the sleeping state inside the mind, often crystalline unformed thoughts and desires. Often what has been going on during the day appears in dreams at nights. History abounds in tales of discoveries which have been made through dreams, and problems, which had apparently been insoluble, being happily solved on wakening from an illuminating dream sequence. An inventor's mind, when totally engrossed in his invention, continues to project the ins and outs of the problems even when he is asleep. It is not unusual for answers to seemingly impossible questions to appear in the course of dreams. But this only happens as a result of total intellectual association with any given subject. Success is the result of devotion and assiduity, and is never the result of some unasked for miracle.

Ethics and Technology

Soon after the completion of a multistoreyed building called Akashdeep in Bombay, the whole construction collapsed. The engineers said that the reason for its collapse was that less cement had been used than specified by safety regulations.

In another statement the director of a technical institute said, "RCC construction is a scientific process which is excellent in the hands of qualified and experienced people, but dangerous if managed by incompetent engineers and contractors." (*Times of India* 4 September 1983).

This appears to be correct and proper explanation of the matter, but if we really think about the word 'incompetent' as applied to the engineers and contractors concerned, we realize that it needs to be replaced by the more appropriate word 'corrupt'. The truth is that such problems in this country are traceable to excessive greed and corruption, and not to a lack of technical expertise.

Bhakra Dam being a major government project, the services of the top engineers were obtained for its construction. But, no sooner was it ready than its walls began to crack, costing the government crores of rupees to rebuild.

Such events are frequent in this country. Despite all such ventures being supervised by technical experts, one hears of roads falling into disrepair the moment they are constructed, of buildings needing to be repaired almost immediately after being built, and of plans remaining incomplete even after projects are completed. All this is the result of corruption and has nothing to do with a lack of technical expertise.

Corruption is a psychological evil, while lack of skill is a technical shortcoming. A psychological evil cannot be removed by technical improvement. If we are genuinely interested in making a better society in our country, we shall have to work for the psychological, or moral reform of the individuals who comprise the nation. Merely bringing about an increase in the number of technical courses available will not make them turn over a new leaf.

The spirit of prayer is the desire of the soul turned to God.

God helps those who help themselves

A young aspiring Muslim student from Azamgarh, A.M. Khan by name, stood nervously before the Principal of Hindu college. "Sir, I should very much like to be admitted to the B.Sc. course in your college." The reaction was sharp. "The admissions are closed. How do you expect to be admitted in the month of October when you are already few months late with your application." Unforeseen circumstances had prevented young Khan from applying sooner, but he simply said, "It would be extremely kind of you if you would help me." Then he added hesitatingly, "One whole year will be wasted for me if I am not granted admission." The Principal's reply was stern. "There is just no question of further admissions."

The principal talked in such an offhand manner that it should have been obvious that there was no point in persisting. Even so the student was determined to try his luck, although all he really expected was to be asked to leave the room immediately. On seeing the insistence of the student, the principal finally asked him rather dryly what his marks had been in the previous examinations, because he felt certain that he must have failed to get admission elsewhere due to his low marks. If this were the case, the principal would have had good grounds for rejecting his application. But the student's reply was just the opposite of what he expected. He said, "Eighty five percent, sir."

These words worked like a miracle. The principal's mood changed all of a sudden, and he asked the student to sit down and show him his certificates. When he had seen them and was satisfied that the student's claim was true, he told him to write out an antedated application.

Not only was the student then given admission in spite of such a long delay in applying, but he was also granted a scholarship by this very same principal who had been so reluctant even to give him a hearing.

Had the same student approached the principal with a third class degree, and had been refused admission as a result, he would surely have gone away full of hatred for the principal concerned, and would have remarked to his friends that it was prejudice which had come in his way. He would not have admitted that he had been refused admission because of his poor results. He would have publicly laid the blame on the principal. It is not always clearly understood by aspirants to high positions that the response of the society we live in is usually an echo of our own condition. We tend to attribute the evils afflicting us to society so that we may shake ourselves free of the blame.

When a man enters life fully prepared to meet its challenges, the world cannot but give him due recognition. Never in any environment does he fail to receive the position of honour which is his due. This results in his being able to maintain high moral standards. His experiences are then marked by bravery, confidence, broadmindedness, gentlemanliness, acknowledgement of others' worth and a

realistic approach to life. He has the will and the capacity to enter into proper human relationships. Society having recognized his talents and he in turn having given due acknowledgement to society he can rise above the negative attitude of hatred and prejudice.

The reverse is true when, because he cannot come up to the required standards, he fails to prove his worth; when he enters life with inadequate training he surely fails to find a place of his choice in the world. As a depressed personality, he almost certainly develops a low moral character. He falls a prey to negative psychology – anger, complaint, even criminality. Failure in life, gives birth to this negative psychology because it is seldom that the person concerned blames himself for his failure. He almost always lays the blame on others for his own shortcomings. Inadequate preparation for life brings two evils simultaneously – failure on one's own part and uncalled – for complaint against others.

A stone is hard to all and sundry. But it presents no problems to anyone who has a tool which can break it. The same is true of the more complex obstacles that face us in life, for it is only if you enter the field of life equipped with the proper skills, that you feel entitled to claim what is your due. Even after the "last date" you can be given admission to a college without anyone else intervening to help you. But without the necessary skills and ability, you will fail to find the place you truly deserve.

Anyone who wants success to come his way in this world of God will first have to make himself deserving of it. He must know himself and his circumstances. He must organize and channels his energies properly. He must enter the field fully armed in every respect, then others can not fail to recognize his true value. He must be like the tree which forces its way up through the undergrowth to take its place in the sun.

The other Quran

A Muslim once gave a non-Muslim a copy of the Quran to read. With great enthusiasm and deference, the non-Muslim took the Quran, and read it from beginning to end. When the two next met, the non-Muslim returned the copy of the Quran with these words: "Now give me the other Quran to read." The Muslim thought that his friend wanted a different translation of the Quran, so he found one and handed it to him. The non-Muslim examined it for a few minutes, then said: "But this is the same Quran. What I meant was – give me the Quran that you people practice in your daily lives."

Though this may seem like just an amusing tale, the fact of the matter is that the non-Muslim had hit the nail right on the head. The Muslims *do* have two Qurans, one which was revealed by God fourteen hundred years ago, and another which they themselves have written. The first is the real Quran. The second is not known as "The Quran" as such. It goes by the name of "Quranic commentary" and "Quranic interpretation". The commentary and interpretation of the Quran that the Muslims have made amounts to a parallel text. It is this second "Quran" which provides the foundation for their practices in the modern age.

The Quran teaches that Islam means submission, but the Muslims have – in their own commentaries – turned their religion into a source of pride. The Quran tells us that salvation depends upon a person's actions, but, from the interpretations Muslims have made of the Quran, one would think that it is enough to be a purely nominal Muslim in order to earn salvation. The Islam contained in the Quran teaches one to become conscious of one's own faults, and seek to correct them; but from what Muslims have made of the Quran one would think that Islam teaches one to pick on the faults of others, and ignore one's own. The Islam of the Quran is a universal religion, which belongs to everyone; but the Islam which Muslims have fashioned for themselves is that of a nationalistic heritage which belongs to them and to no one else.

On Persecution and Oppression

In the year 41AH Imam Hasan ibn Ali formally relinquished power and the Islamic Caliphate fell into the hands of the Umayyads. With the death of the first Umayyad Caliph, Amir Mu'awiya, in 60AH, several successive claimants to the Caliphate arose, and the Umayyads were continually involved in hostilities against them.

Abdullah ibn Zubair was one of these claimants. From his stronghold in Mecca, he held out against Umayyad rule. A force under Hajjaj ibn Yusuf was deployed to deal with the threat from Ibn Zubair. The two men were engaged in constant hostilities, until finally Abdullah ibn Zubair died fighting his adversary in Mecca (73AH).

Imam Bukhari has related in his *Sahih* how two people came to see Abdullah ibn Umer while Abdullah ibn Zubair was involved in fighting against Hajjaj. "People are being destroyed," they complained, "and you – the son of Umer ibn Khattab and a companion of the Prophet, are doing nothing. What keeps you from going out and doing battle?" "God prevents me from doing so, for He has forbidden me from spilling my brother's blood," Abdullah ibn Umer replied. "But hasn't God said: 'Fight them until there is no more oppression?'" they protested. "We did just that," Ibn Umer told them. "In the Prophet's day we fought until there was no more oppression, and God's religion reigned supreme. Now you want me to fight so that there should be oppression, and the religion of others' besides God should reign supreme."

Another tradition goes into ibn Umer's reply in greater detail. The two men pointed out that Ibn Umer went on a pilgrimage to Mecca every other year, but did not join in jihad, although he knew the importance that had been attached to it in the Quran. Ibn Umer told him that Islam was based on five things: belief in God and His Prophet; prayer five times a day; fasting during the month of Ramadhan; paying the poor-due and going on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Then the two men mentioned the verse of the Quran in which the Muslims are told to fight until there is no more oppression, and God's religion reigns supreme. "That's what we did in the Prophet's day," Abdullah ibn Umer replied. "At that time Islam was in the minority, and Muslims used to be persecuted – even killed – for their faith. When Islam became strong this persecution came to an end."

During the caliphate of Uthman ibn Affan, some people developed political grievances against the Caliph. Entering Medina, they laid siege to his house. Uthman went up on his rooftop and asked them why they were besieging him, and were set on killing him. Did they have any Quranic sanction for their action? One of the rebels came forward and said that they did. He then proceeded to recite the verses of the Quran dealing with jihad and fighting in the path of God.

The rebels considered these verses were valid justification for their action. In their opinion, they were fighting for the removal of a corrupt government. They considered their cause a just one, condoned by the Quran. Uthman, however, did not accept their reasoning. These verses, he told them, are not about you and your companions; they are about us, the companions of the Prophet.

The people who had besieged Uthman were all Muslims. They even cited verses of the Quran in support of their action. Yet they received no support from the Sahaba, the companions of the Prophet. According to Ali, they had erred in their interpretation of Quranic verses, applying to Muslims verses which in fact referred to pagans and idolators.

The "Khawarij" who fought against the fourth Caliph Ali all professed the Islamic faith. One might even say that they were pious and devout Muslims, who produced verses of the Quran in support of their actions and demands. Yet the Muslim community has never condoned their rebellion against Ali. Abdullah ibn Umer said of the Khawarij insurrection that they made the mistake of applying to Muslims verses of the Quran which had been revealed with regard to infidels and idolators. Rather than explaining the Quran, he said, they were distorting it.

In various countries of the Muslim world, modern Islamic movements are engaged in armed struggles against their own Muslim governments. When one looks at these struggles in the light of statements of the Sahaba quoted above, one finds that they cannot be justified from an Islamic point of view. Islam strongly condemns severance of Muslim unity in pursuit of political demands. To apply the label "jihad" to Muslim fratricidal conflicts is totally misleading. To produce verses of the Quran in support of such conflicts only add insult to injury.

Recognizing Oneself

God has a special purpose for every individual human being. To be born into this world is to make a promise to God that one will spend one's life fulfilling the purpose that God intends for one. The worth of every human being lies in his faithfulness to this promise.

God has endowed every individual with certain talents. These talents may be inborn, or they may develop at a later stage in life. It is for every human being to recognize where his talents lie, thereby enacting the role that God has singled out for him, using his talents for the purpose God intended. One who recognizes himself in this way has taken up his true place in God's pattern of creation, while one who fails to do so will find himself at odds – not only with himself – but with the whole of creation.

This can be illustrated by the cases of two companions of the Prophet Mohammad. Abu Huraira was one of the companions, and Khalid, the son of Walid, another. No less than 5,374 traditions (sayings of the Prophet) have been related on the authority of Abu Huraira, while less than one hundred can be traced back to Khalid. Extraordinary as this disparity may seem, all it indicates is a difference in the arena in which they worked. It does not mean that one of them did more for Islam than the other.

Abu Huraira and Khalid were both sincere, dedicated Muslims, but as regards talents they were very different from each other. Each of them awoke to his separate vocation in life, and followed it implicitly. In accordance with his own particular abilities, Abu Huraira picked one arena in which to serve the cause of Islam, while Khalid picked another, equally suitable one, for himself.

Before Khalid became a Muslim, he took part in several military campaigns against Islam. He later told of how he used to fight with the feeling that he had "adopted a mistaken stance" – that he was fighting for the wrong cause. His conscience continued to haunt him, until shortly before the conquest of Mecca, when he went to Medina and accepted Islam.

Khalid was by nature exceptionally brave and courageous. He recognized this quality of his, and saw how to use it to full effect. By becoming fully aware of himself, he recognized the special part that had been delegated to him on the vast stage of the Islamic arena. He determined to use the courage God had given him to destroy polytheistic religion, and establish monotheism in its place. Khalid, therefore, dedicated the rest of his life to active service in the cause of Islam. Continually he would ask God to make him strong and steadfast in this path, and he also used to ask God's Prophet to pray for him. So great were his services to Islam that the Prophet called Khalid "one of God's swords, drawn against the idolators."

As for Abu Huraira, he did not have the same qualities as Khalid. What he did have, however, was a prodigious memory. Recognizing where his talents lay, he resolved to use them in the service of Islam.

It is related in the Hadith that Abu Huraira once asked the Prophet to pray that God should give him knowledge which he would not forget. The Prophet said "Amen" to that, and prayed as Abu Huraira had requested. Abu Huraira's exceptional memory was both a result of the Prophet's prayer for him, and also of his own eagerness to serve Islam in the way most suited to his talents and temperament. More traditions have come down to us by way of Abu Huraira than any other companion of the Prophet.

Under the protective wing of such prayers, he devoted himself heart and soul to the area in, which he was given to work. Spending as much time as he could in the company of the Prophet, he listened attentively to what was said, memorizing it and – when the need arose – writing it down. By recognizing where his own talents lay, and doing all he could to develop them, he has taken his place in Islamic history as the greatest original relator of the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad.

Every person has a responsibility to first recognize himself – to see where his own talents lies and do all he can to channel them in a positive direction. By doing this one is benefiting, not only himself, but even more the cause to which one is committed.

28 March 1986

Doing little jobs does not belittle a person

The caliph, 'Umer Ibn 'Abdul' Aziz was talking to a person late one night. The lamp started to go out. "I will wake up the servant. He will put oil in it," the man said. 'Umer told him not to do so. He himself arose, fetched oil and put it in the lamp. "I was 'Umer Ibn 'Abdul Aziz before I performed this little task," he said, "and I still am 'Umer Ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz.

29 March 1986

Fatality

The American space shuttle, Challenger, built at a cost of one billion dollars, was launched into space on January 28, 1986. But just one minute after its lift-off, it exploded violently, reducing itself and its seven passengers to ashes. No one survived to tell the tale of the tragedy.

Man went into space for the first time in 1957, the present space ship, Challenger, being the 25th space shuttle of its kind. It was ironic that crores of happily expectant people should have been watching the whole event on television.

The seven passengers who were annihilated in this disaster were rightly called 'Space Heroes' by the newspapers. One of these passengers was a school teacher, a Mrs. Christa Mc Auliffe, aged 37. She was to have given the first televised lessons to classes from a spacecraft. In her interview before the journey on 22nd July, 1986 with the Educational News Service, she said:

"I feel probably safer going into space than driving around the New York streets."

The Times of India (New Delhi, January 30, 1986).

Our villagers envy the inhabitants of the capital. Those who live in the capital envy the New Yorkers. But the city-dwellers of New York are not any more satisfied with their lot than people anywhere else in the world. They share in the general restlessness of the developed world, hoping to cross new frontiers and find not only adventure, but safety and peace in space. But with the cruel irony of fate, their representatives had no sooner set into space than they were reduced to nothingness in the worst disaster in space history. All their hopes and aspirations were as if they had never existed.

With what high hopes man launches himself on new ventures, and how cataclysmic is his end.

Whoever listens to slander is himself a slanderer.

--ALI

Answer without Reproof

At the beginning of his mission, the Prophet of Islam was protected by his uncle, Abu Talib. The death of Abu Talib in the tenth year of the Prophet's mission gave the people of Mecca a chance to expel him from their clan. They took the opportunity, and the Prophet was forced to look for another patron. He went with another of his uncles, Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, to the fair of Ukkaz. There he visited the tents of several tribes, asking them to take him under their wing so that he could continue his preaching work. But for fear of the Quraysh, none was prepared to do so. Next year the Prophet once again visited various Arab fairs in search of a patron. Eventually he met with six men from the Aus and Khazraj tribes of Medina. The Prophet communicated to them the message of Islam. They asked him what form the revelations which came to him took. In answer, he recited to them some verses from Surah Ibrahim. On hearing these verses, their hearts mellowed, and they accepted Islam. It was night time. The Prophet was still talking to the people from Medina when Abbas passed by. He recognized the Prophet's voice and, came to him. He asked the Prophet who the people sitting with him were. The Prophet told him that they were people from Medina. "I communicated to them the message that I had communicated to other tribes before them," he said. "They have accepted it, and believe in my prophethood. They are ready to take me to their own town." Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib descended from his camel, tied it up, and addressed the party from Medina; "People of Aus and Khazraj," he said, "this is my nephew and he is dearer to me than anyone. If you verify that he is a Prophet, believe in him and if you want to take him with you, you must give me a solemn promise. Only then will my mind be at rest. I want you to promise that you will not disgrace him and will not deceive him. There are Jews in your neighbourhood, and the Jews are his enemies. I do not think that my nephew will be safe with them in the vicinity." Asad ibn Zarara, who was leader of the people of Medina, objected to what Abbas said. It seemed to him that doubt was being cast on their integrity. He asked the Prophet for permission to answer Abbas. "You may do so," the Prophet said, "but refrain from rebuking him."

The Life-Giving Effects of Belief in Death

A young man graduated from an Islamic University in India. He had intended to pursue his studies further, but, before he could do so he received news from home which shattered his resolve. His father had died. The small amount of land which his family owned had been looked after by his father. Now there was no one left to till the land; his mother and little brothers and sisters were left alone at home. He was now the only bread-winner in the family. Conscious of his responsibilities, he realized that there was only one thing he could do now that his father had died. He would have to give up any idea of further studies and return home to take up his father's work on the family farm.

The young man enjoyed a close relationship with one of the senior teachers in the university. He went to see this teacher, and told him that he was taking leave of him now. He was going home and would not be returning. The teacher asked him the reason for this sudden change of heart. "My father has died," he explained, "and now I am the senior member of the family. I must return to look after household affairs. There does not seem to be any chance of pursuing my studies further."

His teacher was silent for a moment. Then, looking up at the young man, he asked: "Tell me, are you immune from death? Can you be certain that you yourself will not die on reaching home? What will happen if you do? Who will look after your family then?" No human being, he said, could look after another. God alone is responsible for everyone's upkeep and maintenance. "God will continue to look after your family, even after your father's death. Mortals may come and go, but He carries on His work of providing mankind with sustenance. You persevere with your studies, and leave Almighty God to look after your household. Just imagine for a while that you too have passed away."

The young man took his teacher's advice. He abandoned the idea of going home, and decided to leave his family affairs in the hands of God. He carried on with the arrangements that he had been making for further education, sending an application to Medina Islamic University, and seeing it through all the necessary channels. His application was accepted, and he went to Medina. Once his course there was completed the Darul Ifta of Saudi Arabia sent him to an African country in a missionary and teaching capacity. In April 1980, after he had been in Africa for ten years, he met Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, and told him that both he and his family were happy with the way things had turned out for him in Africa. He traces his whole success to those magic words of his teacher: "Just imagine for a while that you too have passed away."

To base one's life on belief in death is thought of as a negative attitude. But, in fact, belief in death has a dynamically positive effect on people's lives. When people really become aware of the fact that they are going to die, they become better positioned to live their lives to the full. They see death and life as they really are: having seen death, they also come to know life better too.

32 March 1986

“PECCAVI”

When Sir Charles Napier conquered Sindh in 1843, his victory message to the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, bore the single word, *Peccavi*.

A strange message indeed, considering that there had been no prior understanding between the military officer and the Governor General as to what this word was supposed to imply. But the Governor General was not at a loss even for a moment. He recognized the word as a Latin expression meaning “I have sinned”, and immediately gathered that Napier had conquered Sindh.

Although this message may have been so worded more in order to be facetious than to keep the information secret, it illustrates how necessary it is for there to be capable and quick-thinking people in charge of affairs whenever a situation calls for delicacy and finesse. It is not always that a communication can be explicit to the point of being blunt, and it is very often essential to be able to read between the lines. This calls for great alertness, a sharpening of the intelligence and, above all, the widest possible education.